

HELP

A call to our Friends

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DESIGN COMPETITION



Lt. Petrosino Park Redevelopment Design Competition 1996

Adjacent to StoreFront, at the intersection of Cleveland Place, Kenmare and Lafayette streets sits an irregularly surfaced concrete wedge surrounded by a wrought iron fence. Long neglected and under utilized as a public space, this semi-park presents itself an important opportunity for StoreFront's program of building projects. In collaboration with the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and with support from the City Council member Kathryn Freed, and through the concern of the community, StoreFront has initiated a multi-phase project to re-design the park as an active and articulated public space. Following the new facade of StoreFront by Vito Accardi and Steven Holl, StoreFront turns the corner, to make another contribution to the built environment of this community.

Registration begins: April 1, 1996
Competition Perspective Available: April 1
Registration Deadline: May 15
Design Submission Due: September 1
Exhibition of Selected Entries at StoreFront: October 1996
Entry Fee: \$50

Winning designs will be selected for consideration by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. For further information and schedule on the project, please write or fax to: 212-431-5755

Lt. Petrosino Park Redevelopment Project
StoreFront for Art and Architecture
97 Kenmare Street
New York, NY 10012

UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Adriaan Geuze West 8 April-May 1996

The work of West 8, a Rotterdam based studio of architects, city planners, and industrial designers led by landscape architect Adriaan Geuze, illustrates the increasing importance of landscape architecture in today's urban expansions and resource depletion. Fitfully, Geuze's projects are about designs and ideas of re-incorporating available spaces and places, and on the re-arrangements of urban demolition and dumping sites. Willing to negotiate within existing contexts, rather than up ending them, his attitude on design is anti-monumental. Fitting with the Dutch history of claiming land from the sea, his view of landscape is not about reclaiming or returning to nature but rather appropriate artificialization of the given nature. And like the Dutch "polders," Geuze's landscape, thus, is about creating generous yet open platforms upon which other and unforeseen events can rise above it. Contrary to the secondary role of landscape architecture, having to vegetate or sculpt around the buildings, Geuze often seeds plans and strategies from which architecture can emerge.

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13 February—30 March, 1996

the Pull of Beauty

STOREFRONT

ART AND ARCHITECTURE
97 KENMARE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10012, U.S.A.

SYMPOSIUM

THE PULL OF BEAUTY SEMINAR IS CONCEIVED WITH A DESIRE TO REVIEW OUR CURRENT CONCEPTIONS OF ORNAMENT AND DECORATION IN CONTEMPORARY AND PRESENT ARTS. IN PARTICULAR, THE SEMINAR IS INTENDED TO REASSESS THE PREVAILING PREJUDICE AGAINST DECORATION AND TO OPEN AN AREA OF DISCUSSION IN WHICH TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBILITY OF A RENEWED ORNAMENTAL VOCABULARY. THERE ARE ISSUES OF CONTENT TIED TO THE SUBJECT OF DECORATION, AND A CENTRAL QUESTION FOR THE CONFERENCE IS WHETHER OR NOT IT IS POSSIBLE TO HAVE DECORATION THAT IS CONTEMPORARY AND RELEVANT WHILE BEING NEITHER ESCAPIST NOR SENTIMENTAL.

February 17, 1996

11am

Robert Kushner
Jean Gardner
Richard Martin
Jeff Perrone
Valerie Jaudon

3pm

Eva Zeisel video
Joost Elffers
Laurene Leon
Mark Wigley
Joyce Kozloff

at

DIA Center for the Arts
548 West 22nd Street, New York City

THE PULL OF BEAUTY

Using hardware to examine the role of decoration and ornament in modern design, this exhibition/installation will feature new functional hardware designs in the form of prototypes and drawings commissioned from eleven artists, architects and designers.

February 13 - March 30 1996

opening reception: february, 13, 6-8pm
gallery hours: tuesday-saturday 11-6pm

CURATED BY

VICTORIA MILNE
AND KIKI SMITH

EXHIBITION DESIGN
OPERATIVES, INC.
PAUL LEWIS
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MARC TSURUWAKI

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Blome, Inc., Germany.
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and Friends

THIS EXHIBITION HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF GRAHAM FOUNDATION FOR ADVANCED VISUAL ARTS AND THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS

STOREFRONT

art + architecture
97 kenmare street, new york, ny 10012, usa tel: 212.431.5795 fax: 212.431.5755

EXHIBITION

the Pull of Beauty

February 13—March 30, 1996
Opening Reception: December 12, 6-8pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday, 11-6pm



If you received professional training in architecture or design in the west in the last fifty years, or if you read respected publications in these fields, then you have certainly been exposed to the modern doctrine on ornament. Your exposure may have been explicit, like reading Leos Ornament is Crime, or it may have been implicit, like learning the value in Rietveld's zig-zag chair. Perhaps your professor smidely remarked that considering it's floral victorian contexts, it was almost worth losing Paxton's crystal palace. Or perhaps you were among the generations of American architects taught by European modernists like Serge Chermayeff, who told London's Art worker's guild in 1929 that "Meaningless decoration as such is desecration."

The aspect of the modern philosophy that remains admirable, and from which, especially in Europe, it derived its strength is its political agenda. To quote Chermayeff again in 29: "The furniture of Today and Tomorrow must be strong, cheap and mass-produced, of good, simple, and machine dictated design... a new furnishing period" is opening before our eyes - of good things for all instead of collecting for the few."

The movement was initially associated with the machine, and from that association were to follow myriad developments for the public good: workers were to have more time for personal fulfillment, high-quality goods were suddenly to become affordable to them, and a great equalization was to revolutionize society.¹ However machines have become perfect while society has not — a condition that deprives the clean-form-philosophy of its inspiring myth. The modernist's romantic belief in social revolution, or perhaps redemption, has come up bankrupt.

This of course, is not news — rational form was downgraded from a universal truth to an optional aesthetic some time ago. But as we leave the romance of modernism's original goals, and its later severity, we are without a constructive, communicative, optimistic philosophy. Postmodernism, because it focuses on the re-use of forms, clearly despairs of creating any new or genuine expression, and often turns into cynical amalgamation without sentiment. These movements have left us impoverished in some ways, hungry for authentic communication.

Perhaps we can consider the expressiveness of a decorative design aesthetic to be ready for renewal. This by no means is to say that the subtext of design should become less critical — this is no wish for escapist curlicues and fold-over — but it seems clear that expressiveness, and the humanism that its presence can indicate, may be appropriate now. It is possible to imagine a decorative vocabulary that is neither sentimental nor sarcastic, one that is expressive in a way that is creative, optimistic, unsentimental, and appropriate to our time.

This is swimming upstream, however, because whatever one wants to call the period in which we now are, we still accept this modern view toward decoration not as the philosophy of a certain period, but as received doctrine. That is to say that intellectually, in the culture of design and architecture, we are still essentially within the modern period, and so have not genuinely reassessed the principal tenet that decoration is desecration and ornament is crime. To return to the texts from which this principle came, however, is to show an emperor without a figleaf: the argument against decoration reads as romantic and now irrelevant prejudice, understandable as a political position in its day, but as applicable today as animism.

At the moment, however, gender, virtual reality, globalization and other concepts are used to discuss decisions that are often aesthetic. Once this romance of the machine was the operative rationale, and now social theories are used to underlie designs, but the moment that any aspect of a design has an aesthetic basis, all underlying philosophy is disconnected from the project. Remaining within the modernist mind set, we have unquestioningly inherited this myth that it is possible to create a design vocabulary that is not based on aesthetics, and that is rational in some way. Philosophically speaking, though, as soon as one thinks "It would look better a little shorter," "It" might as well be covered in a floral chintz. There is no defensible line to draw that would distinguish "good" design from any other subjective taste.



So, what explains the persistence of this prejudice against ornament? Convenience, certainly. Right angles are cheap, and craftspeople are both scarce and expensive. In fact, the flow of theories regarding the success of modernism and its place in society is unending, and I will not survey them here. One theory specifically regarding ornament that may be new however, is this: it is risky. "Risky"? To be a sentimental fop? Risky to my dignity, perhaps, but not risky in the way for instance, showing my solution in a competition would be."

It is, though — risky more along the lines of proposing marriage. Genuine, good decoration is an expression, and in personal expression one is revealed and made vulnerable. As with many things in society, we have an arrogant, vaguely disgusted, response to something we fear, in this case the challenge of this kind of expressiveness. But an arrogant, vaguely disgusted response is what we would rather not be aware of, what we would be much more comfortable retaining as a needed buffer against that fearsome vulnerability.

This defensive response is a common device in society, with obvious and ugly frequent application. And in fact, the connection between this fear-turned-to-disgust response to ornament, and society's response to the emotional and feminine (whether in men or women), is obvious.



You surely can follow the course of that argument yourself. Let us return to the creative core of devising another's environment. It must, for every designer and architect, include some sense of satisfaction in influencing the experience of the user. Dieter Rams designed a green switch on a travel alarm clock, the intelligent function of which gives me joy. Raphael Moneo recently designed a path, from the illuminated interior of pop art to the celestial radiance of ancient Rome, that communicates profoundly to a museum visitor. We may think of this "influencing another's experience" as a kind of communication. Rams and Moneo have given an elegant encounter that is unavailable in any other medium, they have communicated with design.

One might consider communication to be the essential element of a cultural endeavor, whether in the form of a book, car, building, plaza, speech, electronic letter, gown, frame, newscast, vessel, meal or graffiti. These all succeed the more clearly they convey their overt or implicit meaning to their audience. We are not talking, necessarily, about easy communication, nor necessarily positive. Often, as in the case of graffiti or even Comme des Garçons, for instance, the message is partly about group identity, or exclusion. If we take the culturally essential aspect of communication to the issue of ornament, however, one is moved, again, toward the curiosity of decoration's rejection.

Is it too simple to say this: every aspect of a design communicates, so developing a building or an industrial design that does not communicate is not possible, and, since what is made is communicative, is it not an affectation to suppress its expressive potential?



It is not a stretch to say that communication, in design, is deeply connected to the decorative; one can see it in a glass doorknob or in a brass drawer pull. It is through these details that every work of architecture reaches for the resident's hand, in fact, hardware marks the only spot one is really intended to touch a building. In its role as the moment of physical contact with a building, therefore, hardware marks the location in which the most intimate, in the physical sense, communication takes place.

Architectural hardware is the ideal voice for this discussion of decoration because the most humble fitting still plays a role as a visual ornament. In fact as any handle design, perhaps aspiring to modernist discretion, approaches invisibility, it also approaches uselessness, hardware must reveal itself. So not only is hardware the place of physical interaction, but it must also draw attention to itself visually, and it fails if it does not. Is this not a prescription for decoration? To meet this program of visual self-proclamation is nothing other than to be decorative. But rather than holding one hostage to a doorknob's "narcissism," fulfilling this requirement of hardware opens a rich opportunity: a light plate can be a personal missive from the designer to the one whose hand turns the switch. That aspect of missive, of communication from the designer, is the central theme in this exhibition.



Hardware's role, as what we touch in order to control and manipulate interior environments, is that of a tool. Through it we change the flow of traffic or air, the illumination, the temperature, the space one has access to, the water. Hardware forms the knobs on the machine for living. In each instance it offers environmental control but often so intimately that architectural hardware becomes almost invisible to the user as an extension of herself.

In the question of the tool's imperceptibility arises the question of perceptible decoration. Can something be decorative to the touch? Is it possible for a handle to be expressive in the dark? In use? Is "the decorative" only a superficial experience cheaply available to the eye — not the hand, not the body, not the ear?²

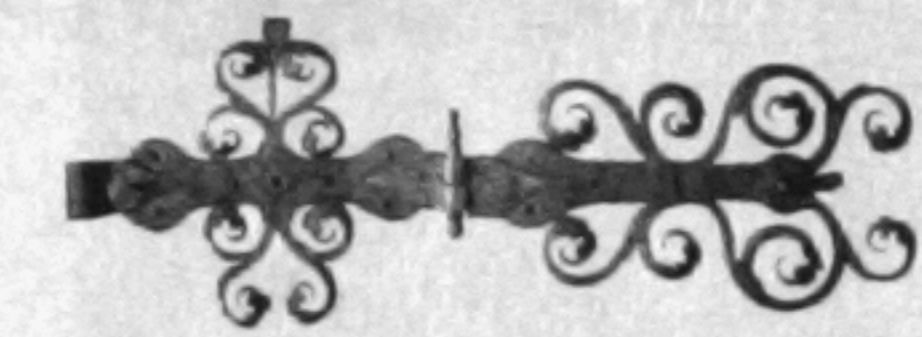
Heidegger has a discussion that is relevant to this exhibition in which he analyzes our perception of tools as "ready-to-hand":

"In dealings such as...[using a hammer], where something is put to use, our concern subordinates itself to the 'in-order-to' which is constitutive for the equipment we are employing at the time; the less we just stare at the hammer-Thing, and the more we seize hold of it and use it, the more primordial does our relationship to it become, and the more unworldly is it encountered as that which it is — as equipment. The hammering itself uncovers the specific 'manipulability' of the hammer. The kind of Being which equipment possesses — in which it manifests itself in its own right — we call 'readiness-to-hand.' Only because equipment has this 'Being-in-itself' and does not merely occur, is it manipulable in the broadest sense and at our disposal. No matter how sharply we just look at the 'outward appearance' of Things in whatever form this takes, we cannot discover anything ready-to-hand. If we look at Things just 'theoretically,' we can get along without understanding readiness-to-hand. But when we deal with them by using them and manipulating them, this activity is not a blind one; it has its own kind of sight, by which our manipulation is guided and from which it acquires its specific 'thingly' character...."

"Practical" behavior is not 'altruistic' in the sense of 'selfless.' The way it differs from theoretical behavior does not lie simply in the fact that in theoretical behavior one observes, while in practical behavior one acts, and that action must employ theoretical cognition if it is not to remain blind; for the fact that observation is a kind of concern is just as primordial as the fact that action has its own kind of sight...."

The peculiarity of what is proximally ready-to-hand is that, in its readiness-to-hand, it must, as it were, withdraw in order to be ready-to-hand quite authentically. That with which our everyday dealings proximally dwell is not the tools themselves. On the contrary, that with which we concern ourselves primarily is the work — that which is to be produced at the time, and this is accordingly the ready-to-hand too."³

Clearly, in using architectural hardware, our experience of the tool is subordinated to the purpose to which we put it; usually, we do not really see the window latch when we use it, we might not recognize a daily doorknob. This exhibition is therefore an uncovering of this arena of our actions in a building.



For the Storefront For Art and Architecture, this exhibition will take up an issue forming a direct opposite to that of the Acconci/Holl façade. The Acconci/Holl manipulation of the sense of interior/exterior is an abstract and macro-scale reconsideration of space. Hardware, on the other hand, is the finest and most palpable aspect of the built environment. They represent, perhaps, caricatures of the extremes in the divergent interests of architecture and design. Design always involves the issue of "ready-to-hand," of being imperceptible in the service of function.



This essay is written in promotion of a conviction, and it, with the exhibition, exist because Kiki and I like decorative things.

Victoria Milne
New York
1/21/96

¹A parallel worth mentioning here is that a rather non-mechanical machine, the computer, is in many ways achieving, among the employed, that revolution expected by the intellectuals of 1920, in which everyone is elevated to the position of skilled manager, even if it is only of a sophisticated machine. And as the computer empowers people differently (for example, enabling the impaired, merging professions — editor/designer, industrial designer/modelbuilder), it moves

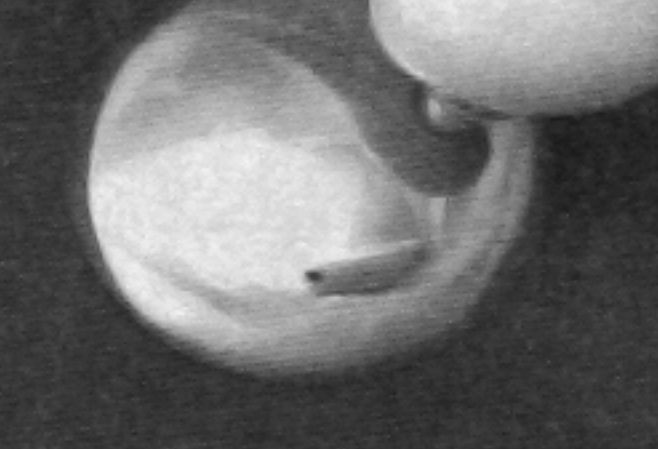
one sector of society toward the egalitarian, creative fantasies of the industrial era. Another related digression concerns an elegant symmetry between the subject of this exhibition and the "hardware" of the computer world: both are the location of our insignificant, or unmemorable, physical interaction with a greater architecture — one of space and the other of information. ²I enjoy the thought of the role hardware plays in one's self image: How victorious were you when you could reach the faucet the first time? When you got to open the door? To push the button on the elevator? ³Being and Time, (Sein und Zeit) Martin Heidegger, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson, Harper & Row, New York, 1962, p. 96-99.



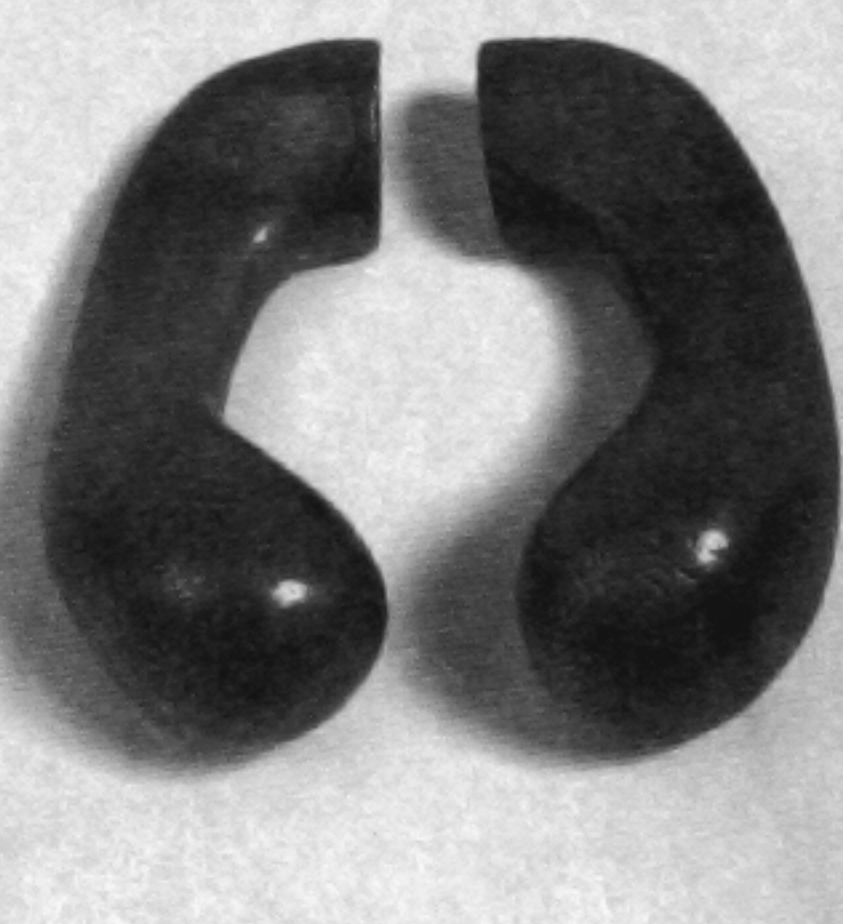
Tom Joyce, gothic knocker study piece, 1983, forged mild steel.



Laurene Leon and Constantin Boym, Sharpie, 1995, wood, paint and brass, 2 5/8 x 4 3/4".



Joel Fisher: Doorknob, 1989, bronze, 7 1/4 x 3 x 2 1/2" overall.



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February 17, 1996

11am
Robert Kushner
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3pm
Eva Zeisel video
Joost Elffers
Laurene Leon
Mark Wigley
Joyce Kozloff

at
DIA Center for the Arts
548 West 22nd Street, New York City

JOOST ELFFERS
THE CO-AUTHOR OF *TEXTILE DESIGNS*, (WITH SUSAN MILLER)
PUBLISHED BY HARRY N. ABRAMS, 1991.

JEAN GARDNER
THE NEW MEDIA SPECIALIST ON URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT AT THE NEW LAB FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING, IN NEW YORK. SHE IS ALSO PROFESSOR OF THEORY AND HISTORY OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE AT PARSONS IN THE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN.

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A PAINTER IN NEW YORK. HIS WORK HAS USED DECORATIVE SOURCE MATERIAL SINCE 1972, AND HAS EXHIBITED THIS WORK EXTENSIVELY IN THE UNITED STATES, EUROPE AND JAPAN. HE IS A FOUNDER OF THE PATTERN AND DECORATION MOVEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY ART.

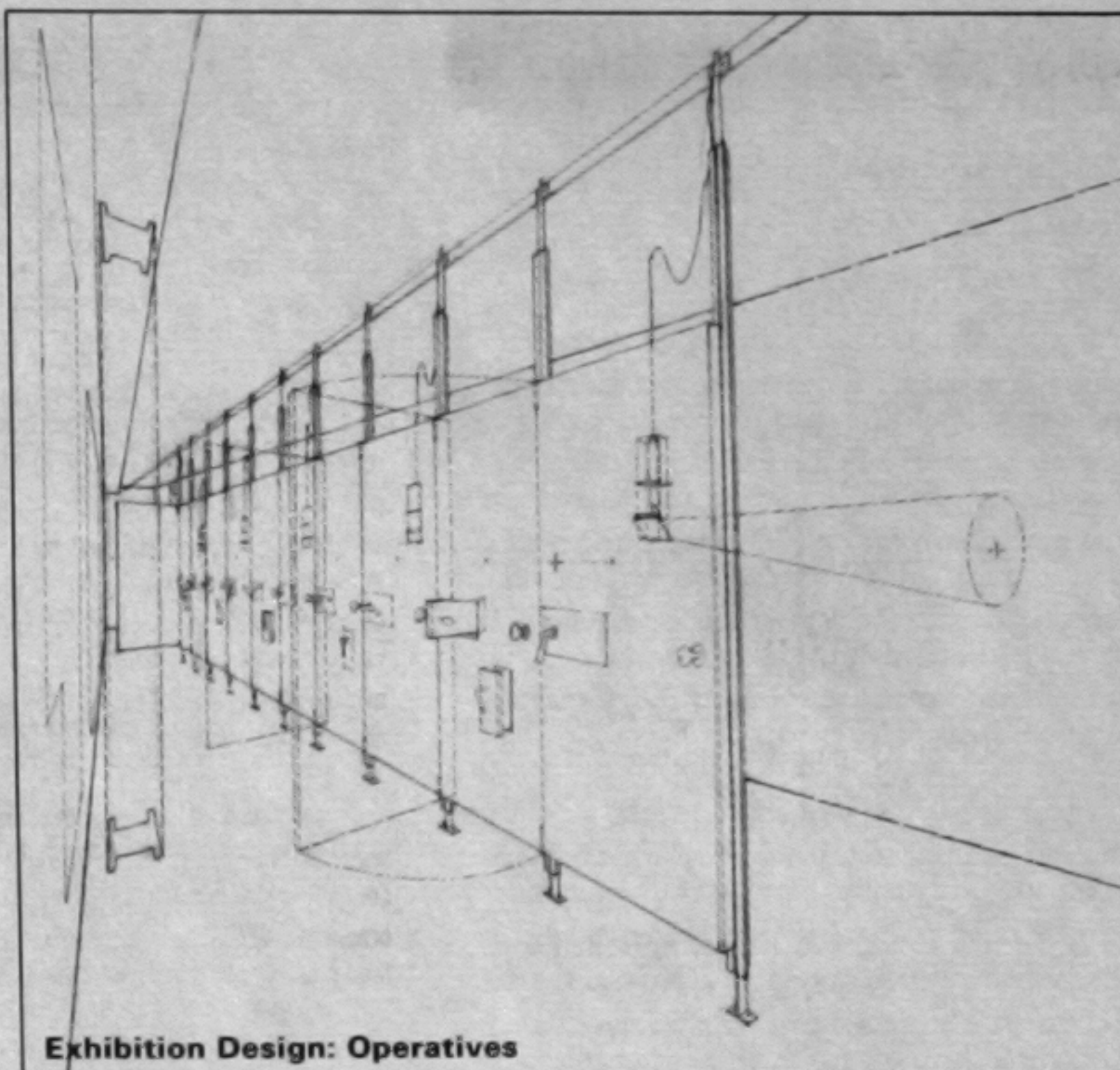
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RICHARD MARTIN
THE CURATOR OF THE COSTUME INSTITUTE AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK.

EVA ZEISEL
[will appear on video tape]
INDUSTRIAL DESIGNER SHE HELD THE POSITION OF ART DIRECTOR OF THE CHINA AND GLASS INDUSTRY OF THE RUSSIAN REPUBLIC BEFORE IMMIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES, WHERE SHE WAS SELECTED BY THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART TO DESIGN DINNERSWARE. IN 1953 SHE APPEARED ON A PANEL AT MOMA TITLED "IS ORNAMENTATION GOOD DESIGN?" WITH EDGAR KAUFMANN AND PHILIP JOHNSON.

MARK WIGLEY
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF ARCHITECTURE AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF A NEW BOOK FROM MIT PRESS: *WHITE WALLS, DESIGNED DRINKS: THE FASHIONING OF MODERN ARCHITECTURE*.

JEFF PERRONE
AN ARTIST WHO HAS LONG BEEN INTERESTED IN DECORATION AND NON-WESTERN MATERIAL CULTURE.



Exhibition Design: Operatives

Beth Kattelman: Flushing Fantasie, 1995, brass, from the Rococornucopia Bathroom Suite.



Tom Joyce, Hinge, 1989, forged mild steel. Collection of the artist.



TEMPORARY INSTALLATION

SURFACE TENSION

James Cathcart

April 3-8 1996

Opening Reception: April 3, 6-8pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 1-6pm

James Cathcart will generate an installation furthering his investigation into the use of vinyl-based stretch film in tension. When applied as a dense web, the stretched film [an industrial form of saran wrap] forms cocoon-like structures around clusters of objects working internally in compression. For a period of one week he will be using the storefront and its surrounding environment as a studio to create a series of constructions exploring the structural possibilities of this unique method of building. This research is funded by the Greenwall Foundation.



Wrapped Dock structure, Long Island City, NY.



Wrapped Bicycle and Chair, Williamsburg, NY.